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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the theoretical assumptions of the triadic method, the structure of the triad, and the processes involved in triadic supervision. The triadic method represents an attempt to create a means of supervision which will help counseling practicum students develop a more positive attitude toward supervision; will enable them to become skillful in the fundamental processes involved in supervision; will train them in the art of effective criticism; and will be adaptable to a wide variety of educational and vocational settings. Triadic supervision involves three students who, on a rotating basis, assume the roles of the supervisee, the commentator, and the facilitator. The author explains the function of each person in the triad, giving particular attention to the functions of the facilitator and the role of the counselor-educator. This article is intended to accompany a videotape which depicts the use of the triadic method in the training of counseling supervisors. This paper also includes an address to which those requesting more information on the videotape may write. (Author/KRP)

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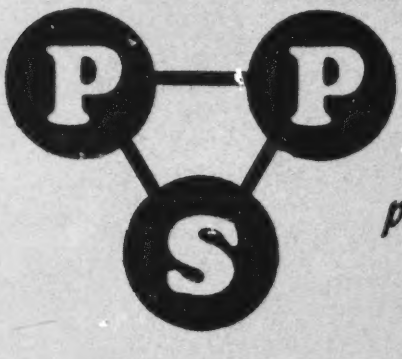


*pupil personnel services*

# *training professionals to anticipate the challenges of the future*

## A LEADER'S GUIDE TO THE TRIADIC MODEL OF SUPERVISION

Charles G. Spice, Jr., Ph. D.

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## PREFACE

In July of 1974 the United States Office of Education awarded the Counselor Education Department at the University of Pittsburgh a grant to disseminate some of the more salient structures and processes identified and developed through a previous three year training program. The Training of Counselor Supervisors was germane to this concept.

One of the most crucial aspects of a Counselor's training is the supervisory process, and while a great deal of attention has been given to the theoretical constructs inherent in supervisory practice, there is a paucity of knowledge or methodologies related to training effective counseling supervisors.

One innovative approach that may help to fill this voids is the triadic method of supervision developed by Dr. Charles G. Spice, Jr. of the University of Pittsburgh. This manual has been written by Dr. Spice to accompany a videotape of the triadic method depicted as utilized by him in the training of counseling supervisors.

Further explication of the triadic method itself will be available in an article by Dr. Spice, which will be published in an upcoming issue of Counselor Education and Supervision. Information about obtaining the videotaped triadic supervision session may be obtained from the Counselor Education Program, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA. 15260.

## About the Author

Charles G. Spice, Jr. is an Associate Professor of Counselor Education. He completed his Ph.D. in Counselor Education at the University of Wyoming and has worked in University Counseling Centers both in Wyoming and at the University of Pittsburgh.

## INTRODUCTION

The triadic method of supervision has been employed in the training of students enrolled in counseling practicum, both at the master's and doctoral levels. It was developed in an effort to meet several important needs.

Foremost among these is the necessity of helping many students to change their attitudes toward the supervision process itself. For many of them, prior experience with supervision and evaluation has been negative and painful, often leading to considerable resistance to supervision. Ways need to be found to change such attitudes so that students can view supervision in a more positive manner.

Second, if supervision is to become a potent growth-producing process among professionals in the rapidly-increasing number of counseling agencies we now have, there is a need for more effective peer supervision. And if such peer supervision on the job is to become a reality, methods must be found to train students in this skill while they still are in their graduate programs.

Third, methods of supervision must be developed which can be employed in a wide variety of settings, since the proliferation of counseling agencies has created situations with widely differing supervisory possibilities. Some agencies have many trained supervisory personnel, while others do not; some agencies can purchase sophisticated equipment to be employed in supervision, while others cannot. Therefore, the supervision process which stands the greatest chance of being widely employed is one which can make the most use of available human potential, without being dependent upon costly, highly sophisticated equipment.

## Theoretical Assumptions of the Triadic Method

The triadic method is based upon two major assumptions. The first is that supervision is not a unitary process, but a complex one composed of several significant elements. It seems clear that supervision will be more effective if these elements are identified for students and explicitly taught. Once students become skilled in each of the fundamental processes that make up supervision, they can synthesize these processes into their own unique supervisory styles.

The second assumption underlying the triadic method is that good supervision is possible only to the extent that students become skilled in the process of critical evaluation. Because of previous negative experiences with criticism, this is an ability which few beginning students have developed, but one which must be given serious consideration.

The triadic method represents an attempt to create a means of supervision which will help students develop a more positive attitude toward supervision; will enable them to become skillful in the fundamental processes involved in supervision; will train them in the art of effective criticism; and will be adaptable to a wide variety of educational and vocational settings.

## The Structure of the Triad

Triadic supervision involves three students who play different-yet-related roles at each supervisory session. These three roles, which will be described below, are designated as the supervisee, the commentator, and the facilitator. The roles are rotated from session to session, so that each student gains experience in each area. In addition, a faculty member meets with the triad during the early sessions, to demonstrate the various roles and to serve as a model while the students are learning them. Once the roles are learned, the triad can function independently of the faculty member.

## Processes Involved in Triadic Supervision

Although there are three roles in triadic supervision, there are four processes which increase its potency: (1) the presentation of the work sample, (2) the art of sound critical commentary, (3) the encouragement of dialogue, and (4) the deepening of here-and-now communication between supervisee and commentator.

## The Presentation of the Work Sample

In any given session of triadic supervision, the supervisee presents a sample of his work, in the form of a video-tape, audio-tape, or case report. This work sample might be seen as a crystalization of the student counselor's development up to that moment, representing something which has "happened" and cannot be altered. In a way, what is presented for inspection in supervision is the expression of the student's commitment to the client. We can see, then, that students' work is more than just "tapes" and "case reports;" it represents a complex of their attitudes towards themselves, their views of their own potencies as counselors, and their conception of their own strengths and worth in the eyes of others. In a word, they are "out there" in much the same way as a musician is "out there" when he presents to others his interpretation of a musical composiiton. Since these personal factors are operating in any supervisory session, they must be taken seriously. The triadic method provides a means for doing so.

Critical Commentary as an Art

Obviously, there is good criticism and bad, criticism that can enhance people's conception of themselves and further their growth, and criticism which does little more than increase people's sense of their own inadequacy. Since many students have experienced considerable destructive and painful criticism prior to beginning their graduate programs, and since growth-producing critical commentary is so basic in improving students' attitudes toward supervision, skill in this process must be taught to each student, "from the ground up," before meaningful dialogue in triadic supervision itself can be accomplished.

Therefore, prior to any formal supervisory work, students are asked to develop sample commentaries so that they may learn how to criticize in a growth-producing way. The usual procedure is that each student takes a partner, and then each pair is asked to role-play a counselor-client session of about 45 minutes duration. Each "counselor" tapes his or her counseling performance with the "client," and then the roles are reversed. Thus each student obtains a sample tape to exchange with another student, who then is encouraged to develop a written commentary on it.

It must be remembered that in our culture "criticism" often means making people aware of their shortcomings, often to the extent that apprising a person of his or her failings is seen as more important than pointing out positive qualities. Consequently, in developing their critical commentaries, students are encouraged to examine the sample first of all for things which they feel the counselor has done well. This tends to begin the commentary on a positive note. Second, they are encouraged to examine the sample for aspects of the supervisee's counseling behavior which, in the commentator's opinion, require improvement. Third, the commentator is encouraged to look for aspects of the work sample which may provide occasion for fruitful dialogue between the two people: such aspects as client dynamics, the counselor's theoretical position, long-range goals with regard to the client, etc. Here in the "dialogue aspect" of commentary, the commentator and supervisee meet as equals, and can focus upon supervisee goals which might have been achieved differently from the way the commentator would have achieved them, but nonetheless have been achieved well. Meeting together as equals in such dialogue, supervisee and commentator can learn from each other.

An example of suggested format to be used in developing critical commentary is given below:

Supervisee _____

| Tape Footage | Positive Aspects | Improvement Aspects | Dialogue Aspects |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

At least two introductory sessions can be spent profitably helping students to develop a sound and growth-producing critical commentary. Through these "practice" commentaries, students can be taught to focus upon aspects of criticism which they might have missed or taken for granted. Furthermore, these "practice" sessions give experience with some of the processes which will be operative in the triad itself.

The Encouragement of Dialogue

After students have become proficient in developing critical commentary as described above, they are organized into groups of three for the actual process of triadic supervision. A faculty member meets with each triad, particularly in the initial stages, to help students develop competency in each of the three roles.

Before a triadic supervisory session takes place, the student whose work is to be supervised gives his work sample to another in his triad whom he chooses as commentator. The writer usually allows each student to choose his or her own commentator, but this role can be rotated systematically if the group wishes to do so. The commentator is responsible for reviewing the supervisee's work sample in its entiriety and developing a critical commentary prior to the triadic session itself. In this way, the triadic session can begin with two students--the supervisee and the commentator--being familiar with the work sample, which helps to facilitate dialogue, as well as helping to minimize the chance that the supervisee may feel that his or her needs haven't been met because no one is familiar with the entire counseling session.

It is during the supervisory session itself that the remaining processes of triadic supervision--the encouragement of meaningful dialogue, and the deepening of the here-and-now process--come into play. The triadic session usually begins by the supervisee giving a biref description of the counseling session. This may include a description of the client, the client's concerns, the supervisee's goals or feelings about the progress of the counseling session, etc. In this way, the session becomes structured around parameters determined by the supervisee, thus increasing the likelihood that the expressed needs of the supervisee will be taken seriously in the remainder of the session.

Following this brief introduction, the commentator shares the commentary with the supervisee, raising whatever points about the work sample he or she deems significant. The supervisee is in turn encouraged to respond to the points raised by the commentator, so that a meaningful dialogue between the two can develop. The supervisee also is encouraged to raise additional issues of concern to him, which the commentator might not have focused upon. This dialogue is intended to proceed for the balance of the supervisory session, which usually lasts about two hours.

The Deepening of the Here-and-Now Communication

While the supervisee and commentator focus upon the work sample, they are observed by the third member of the triad, who functions as facilitator, focusing attention upon the present here-and-now process going on between supervisee and commentator. There is a sharp contrast between the roles of commentator and facilitator. Wheras the commentator's focus is upon supervisee behavior which already has taken place, the facilitator's comments concern the present dialogue, and represent efforts to deepen and/or clarify this dialogue wherever possible.

A relationship between two people can be deepened and made more meaningful if their communication can be deepened, if they can develop greater accuracy in "getting their message across" to each other and in sharing feelings and attitudes which are correctly understood. The facilitator in triadic supervision attempts to deepen this communication between supervisee and commentator, so that their relationship and dialogue may develop genuine significance. The facilitator may comment on the dialogue whenever he or she feels that:

(1) The message of one participant has been inaccurately preceived by the other. If, for example, it seems that the commentator's response may have been misperceived by the supervisee, the facilitator may ask the supervisee to repeat what he or she heard, and then ask the commentator whether that perception was accurate.
(2) A comment by one person has led to feelings on the part of the other which are not being expressed. In such cases, the facilitator may ask that person to clarify such feelings.
(3) The discussion is getting away from the main issues of supervision. This may be pointed out in an effort to refocus the dialogue.
(4) There may be a parallel between what is happening in the present dialogue between supervisee and commentator, and what has happened previously between the supervisee and the client. The facilitator may attempt to call attention to this parallel.

In these and in any other ways he or she can, the facilitator assists the supervisee and commentator in making their dialogue as accurate and as meaningful as possible.

A Note on the Role of the Faculty Member

A smoothly-functioning triad requires certain kinds of support from the faculty member associated with it. In the early stages, the faculty member's most important function is to serve as a role model for the triad members. This is particularly true for the role of facilitator, since this seems to be the most difficult role for students to learn. In later stages, after students have learned to function effectively in each of the roles, the faculty member becomes free to enter into and make comments pertaining to any aspect of the process where he or she wishes to take part. In this way the faculty member again becomes a model for students as they move toward integrating the three roles into their own unique supervisory styles. Such an integration of supervisory elements offers the best assurance, not only that students will come to see supervision as a positive aid in their own professional development as counselors, but also that they will come to see it as a process which can effectively teach to others after their own formal training is completed. Triadic supervision offers a potent means of bring this about.